

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 CU-02

/058 W

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R 200745Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7013

INFO COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1209

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJECT: STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY. THAI ACTIVIST STUDENTS CONTINUE TO SHOW INABILITY TO ORGANIZAE EITHER STUDENT OR PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ISSUES THEY RAISE, AND WILL PROBABLY PLAY A RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT ROLE IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO TRY TO POPULARIZE LEFTIST ISSUES, AND THE POSSIBILITY REMAINS THAT THEY HAY ULTIMATELY FIND AN ISSUE WITH WIDE PUBLIC APPEAL. END SUMMARY.

1. THAI STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS WILL PROBABLY PLAY A MUCH LESS PROMINENT ROLE IN THE CURRENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAN THEY DID IN THE ELECTION OF JANUARY 1975. WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS JUST HOW MUCH INFLUENCE THEY WILL HAVE, THEY CONTINUE TO SHOW THAT THEY LACK BOTH ORGANIZATION AND MANPOWER, AND APPARENTLY HAVE LITTLE SUPPORT FROM EITHER THE MAJORITY OF UNIVERSITY AND VOCATIONAL STUDENTS OR THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

2. RECENT EFFORTS BY STUDE T ACTIVISTS TO GRAB HEADLINES AND PROMOTE PET ISSUES HAVE DONE POORLY, AND THEY RARELY RECEIVE THE KIND OF PRESS COVERAGE AND PUBLIC ATTENTION THEY DID A YEAR AGO. DURING THE RECENT GENERAL STRIKE  
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IN BANGKOK IN EARLY JANUARY, KRIANGKAMON LAOHAPHAIROTN

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), ANNOUNCED HIS ORGANIZATION'S SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE AND CLAIMED THE NSCT WOULD STAGE THE BIGGEST RALLY EVER ORGANIZED BY STUDENTS IN THAILAND. ACCORDING TO THE BANGKOK WORLD OF JANUARY 5, THE NSCT CLAIMED IT WOULD ATTRACT A CROWD OF 200,000 TO THE RALLY, BUT IT PROVED ITSELF UNEQUAL TO THE TASK. A MEETING CALLED BY KRIANGKAMON TO PLAN THE RALLY WAS CANCELLED WHEN ONLY A FEW OFFICERS OF THE NSCT SHOWED UP, BUT THE NSCT INSISTED THAT THE RALLY WOULD COME OFF. THE CROWD THAT SHOWED UP ON JANUARY 6 FOR THE RALLY WAS GENEROUSLY ESTIMATED AT ABOUT 4,000, MANY OF WHOM WERE MERELY CURIOUS PASSERS-BY. THE PRESS PAID RELATIVELY LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THE GENERAL STRIKE.

3. IN SPITE OF ITS PROBLEMS, HOWEVER, THE NSCT AND ITS LEFTIST ALLIES RETAIN SOME POTENTIAL FOR EXERTING POLITICAL PRESSURE ON THE MODERATE PARTIES, AND THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO TRY TO DO SO. WHILE THEY HAVE CONTINUED TO SHOW ONLY LIMITED ABILITY TO RAISE IMPORTANT ISSUES OR TO MAKE A SUSTAINED EFFORT TO KEEP AN ISSUE ALIVE ONCE IT IS RAISED, THE STIMULUS OF THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN MAY RESULT IN A GREATER EFFORT TO PUBLICIZE LEFTIST POPULAR ISSUES CONCERNING FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND THE RESIDUAL U.S. TROOP PRESENCE. THERE REMAINS THE POSSIBILITY THAT STUDENT ACTIVISTS MAY BE ABLE TO SEIZE UPON AN ISSUE WITH WIDE PUBLIC APPEAL (SO FAR UNIDENTIFIED), AND THUS PLAY A LARGER PART IN THE CAMPAIGN. MASTERS

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** STUDENTS, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, EXTREMISTS, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS  
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**Copy:** SINGLE  
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**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
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**Disposition Authority:** vogelfj  
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**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
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**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** vogelfj  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 03 JUN 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <03 JUN 2004 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <29 SEP 2004 by vogelfj>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN SUMMARY. THAI ACTIVIST STUDENTS CONTINUE TO SHOW INABILITY  
**TAGS:** PINT, PGOV, TH, NSCT, NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006